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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of student affairs administrators, reviewing their past responsibilities and concerns, and considering recent events and actions influencing changes in their role. In conclusion, the author proposes that the administrator should currently be concerned with: (1) opening new channels for student participation in shaping their educational experience, (2) recognizing relevant issues and reasonable dissent, (3) insuring fairness and justice as well as order, (4) understanding issues from students' viewpoints, (5) using the college's resources to prevent disruption through the promotion of constructive alternatives, and (6) making students' views known to the public. (JO)

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STUDENT UNREST

An Administrator's Point-of-View
Donald R. Zander

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The concept of higher education as an ivory tower is gone. Some will moan the loss of the polite interaction between students and professors on philosophical questions. America no longer wants such a creation. The large land grant university and the community or junior college represent America's needs and desires. Higher education can no longer be detached from the world. I for one will not moan its passing. We seldom had it in reality anyway. Now higher education is central to progress and change in almost every field of endeavor. As often as not research has some agro-business or military overtones. And the quiet generation is no longer silent. Dissent is present on many campuses. I believe much of it to be valid.

If a campus isn't the place to express radical ideas or dissent, then American thought and actions could be heading for a sort of facist state.

As a University administrator of student affairs for nearly two decades, I have witnessed and been involved at the battle lines drawn over women's hours, Communist speakers, fraternity discrimination, open houses in dormitories, drinking, a free student press, and student discipline. These were nearly always battles between a parentalistic president or dean of students and enthusiastic students hoping to change the system from within. The Dean was usually playing the game of strategic withdrawal by giving in as little as possible over the longest period of time. Some enlightened Deans knew what they were doing and what they had to do. Most assumed that they had powers which were being eaten away by students and irresponsible faculty members. To give in on any issue was a sign of weakness and loss of power. In addition, giving small concessions would not bring public disapproval.

Deans had to hang on to the power and students had to fight for any concession. Usually the Dean was able to delay the fight, put it into a committee, over-rule the decision, browbeat the students, or just wait until they gave up the fight or graduated.

It was a controlled situation. Usually only the Dean and his staff and the students plus a few faculty were involved. The legislature, the trustees, the general public were never a part. Only a few student leaders were involved and seldom the president of the school. That was the purpose to keep everything within a controlled framework.

Controlled encounter was the rule of the day. The faculty controlled the students in class. The Dean of Students controlled them outside class, or was expected to. There was controlled communication. Students didn't talk with the President except through the Dean of Students. The faculty didn't talk with the trustees. Only the President talked with the legislature. Pre-1960 there was a minimum of interation between the University and its constituencies.

Then came the sit-in, the Birmingham bus boycott, school desegration, civil rights legislation, open housing, and the Vietnam War. Along with these events

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were born new techniques and redefinition of old forms of communication - the sit-in, teach-in, civil disobedience, confrontation, and demands. These have now escalated to non-negotiable demands and even seemingly armed take-overs. The methods can no longer be the same. The waiting for the long drawn-out committee meetings or graduation can no longer work and they should not. The issues that we had years to work on have to be dealt with quickly. We need to discuss little problems before they become big ones. Little time is available to solve big problems that many administrators and faculty knew existed but they didn't want to work on for fear of changing the status quo.

As an administrator I have to worry about the outcomes of these confrontations. But my worry is not how to prevent them because I believe them to be inevitable and, even, necessary, if our colleges and our society is to up-date itself.

Finally, the institutions of higher education, even the new two-year colleges, are dealing with some of the big issues of our society not the seemingly inconsequential in loco parentis games of yesteryear. Our students are forcing awareness and attention to our conflicts of society - non-white and non-Anglo militancy, alienated middle-class youth, repressive public opinion and public officials, heavy-handed police procedures, unequal justice, and unequal opportunity. And as with society-at-large, the system of academic government is not adequate to the task. We say that we are a community of scholars, but in reality every university or college is a welter of private interests, with few knowing much about what their colleagues are doing or caring less. There may be exceptions in the two-year colleges. I hope so. The corporate interests of the institution are constantly subordinated to a welter of selfish projects, in the large universities many projects are more and more carefully honed to appeal to support from business and the federal government.

I have noted that academic government, often, is a series of committee meetings in which months of discussion usually leads to compromise and the least change possible. It is jealously guarded over by a few influential senior faculty members who can tie up a new proposal for years. Again, I hope the two-year colleges are exceptions.

For the college administrator the picture is crucial and challenging. On one side you have a slow methodical, nearly unchanging structure. On the other you have young radicals with short fuses making non-negotiable demands with a very short time limit.

Where does the college administrator stand in this picture? The Dean of Students often supplied many worthy services for students - housing, loans, scholarships, counseling, activity advising, and placement, but he was also seen as the disciplinarian and the local parent. He was to control out-of-class life. I think he should be a sort of ombudsman looking to up-date the institution with the help of the students, interested faculty, and the rest of the administration. Student unrest will persist. We would not want it otherwise. At the same time, we cannot tolerate violence and must work to prevent it.

Some of the items that must be his concern are:

1. Student representation on the academic governing boards. Students have an imput, a point-of-view, that is necessary and desirable for the institution. It should not be restricted to the extra-curriculum,

for the voice is necessary in the total academic community. Students need educational power - a larger voice in shaping their educational programs. I am not talking about a total takeover as some would hear me saying. I am not talking about a consultative relationship where faculty and administrators politely listen and do what they always intended to do. I think we need a kind of partnership in which each person can make his contribution, but decisions are not made without viewpoints of others.

2. Issues must be highlighted. Relevant issues have to be dealt with. Curriculum, student rights, due process, and the right to protest need to be understood by the total community. Curriculum cannot be left to the faculty alone. Students have an imput. Dissent must not be put down. It must be tolerated and even encouraged. But it must be non-violent and not abridge the rights of others.

3. The administrator must concern himself more with justice and fair play than with order although order is considered the business of the administration. Due process procedures for students and faculty have to be established now before the crippling action, if possible. Each of you has a responsibility to set up a working appeal procedure for redress of grievances. Students can be unreasonable but we have to deal with them fairly. As administrators, we are often placed in difficult positions by our procedures. Clark Kerr got his Berkeley outburst because he had to insist that politics and religion must be kept off-campus, as if it ever could be. Grayson Kirk precipitated Columbia with his strong need to discipline wayward students on their methods of protest rather than listening to their issues.

Our students see real hypocrisy around them. Sometimes calls for law and order are hypocrisy. Students see hypocrisy in working with the military or ignoring Biafra. Yet every protest on campus, whether it is non-violent or an attempt to correct some grievious wrong, has been quickly followed by an outcry in the legislature and the public press for the administration to crack down. Each protest has to be treated by the administration in an <u>educational</u> way, not in a public relations way, and not in a political way. Just because the police want to come on campus or the Governor wants them to - doesn't mean they should. What have police got to do with education? Seldom has bringing in the police to crack down solved any issue. The opposite effect is usually the result. Use of force becomes the issue. We see our society moving more and more toward a conservative, law and order by any means, state. Perhaps we are all afraid of change, but we need to change. We used to have few incidents and we could control the situation to placate a hostile group. This is no longer possible.

4. The administrator cannot just give in to every demand. The issue is the important thing. SDS can have a good idea but present it in the wrong way. No matter - the issue is important, not who raises it. Black militants may use the most provocative words in their demands. But the administrator has to get the <u>feel</u> of the issue and not be repelled by the way it is presented. The administrator has to keep his cool. He must communicate with these students and know where the

students are at. He must understand. He must grasp their sense of outrage and even their spirit of anarchy, and recognize the grounds on which they justify confrontation and disobedience. He must tolerate confusion and ambiguity. He cannot allow his staff the luxury of short fuses or snap judgments. When discipline is necessary, it must be done fairly, with written notice, an advocate, and an appeal procedure.

5. The college administrator has to help pull together the resources of the college to assist in the channeling of potentially explosive situations into constructive and progressive channels. Monies are needed for new ideas and new programs. Some ideas have reached their fruition date and can't be postponed until next year's budget or the year after that. There needs to be flexible money for student emergency needs. The college which is the highest creation for intellectual development should not be disrupted by the lack of $4,000 for a black student conference. I believe our students are a marvelous socially conscious group. They are creative and thoughtful. They may need funds to develop their programs now. They can't have them when every dime is put into faculty salaries or lawn mowers.

6. The college administrator has to educate the community to understand legitimate dissent. Here at the University of Minnesota the Vice President for Student Affairs spends 50% of his time consciously explaining students and their actions to the community. We spend more time explaining the student to the general public than we used to in explaining to students why they could not do something because of possible public reaction. We used to stop students from doing things (panty raids) because of possible public reaction. Don't do that because the legislature will cut our budget. Women have to have hours because the public expects it. Now we need to explain the other way around. We ask the general public not to perceive students as anti-authoritarian or malcontents just because they raise some social issues.

<u>Summary</u>

College administrators especially in central student affairs have to be a student ombudsman. Among his duties are:

1. Help students get an educational voice in the college. Open the channels now.
2. Develop relevant issues. Understanding that dissent might be necessary.
3. Concern himself with fair play and justice as well as order.
4. Keep his cool and feel the issues as the students feel them. Work with and for the dissenting student.
5. Keep resources flexible for new and pertinent uses.
6. Educate the community about student discontentment with education and society.

The student union/center is important as the setting for student unrest. Student out-of-class life is where the action is. You should let others define your role in these actions. You ought to be a part of that definition as much or more than the students and the president.